

Providing Leadership in Environmental Entomology

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Cutworms on Tobacco

Several species of cutworms occur in tobacco fields. As with wireworms, these will not be distinguished from one another, but will be referred to collectively as cutworms.

There is usually at least some cutworm damage in some tobacco fields nearly every year. In some years, cutworm pressure may be almost negligible. In other years, such as 1982, cutworms may be a widespread, serious problem. A most frequent site of damage is bottom land, or soils that are heavy in organic matter. Many cutworms feed around the stalk of the plant, feeding at, or just below, the soil surface. They may girdle the stalk, severing the roots from the rest of the plant. Other cutworms may feed on the leaves or may sever leaves from the stalk of the plant. Most cutworms are night feeders. During the day, the worm may frequently be found curled up around the stalk or nearby in the soil, usually just below the soil surface. The worms may move from plant to plant.

The female moth may lay as many as 1,000 eggs on the ground or foliage in grassy or weedy fields. When these hatch, the larvae feed on roots or foliage of the grasses and weeds. Overwintering takes place in the larval stage in the soil or under clumps of trash or grass. In the spring, worms attack whatever vegetation is available with voracious appetites. If the vegetation is newly-transplanted tobacco, serious damage may occur.

Good field sanitation is a key element in the control of cutworms. If weeds and grasses are controlled in the fields prior to planting, cutworm problems can be minimized.



A cutworm feeding on a stem.

Photo: Clemson University CE
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There are several insecticides that are available for control of cutworms on tobacco, both in the plant beds and in the field. Since the list of labeled products is constantly changing, and since available products varies from state to state, there will be no mention of specific products. With all insecticides, read and follow label instructions carefully.

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